

Tips on How to Approach the AP Lit. Essay on Poetry

Unlocking a poem's meaning-two parts: the "What"- (central purpose) and the "How"- (stylistic devices employed to enhance meaning)

- a.** Annotate copiously as you read the first time for poem's meaning (central purpose) and stylistic devices.
- b.** Determine poem's central purpose- there is always a deeper meaning unrelated to plot in great poetry. For example, what universal comment is the poet making about life, mankind, or the human condition? Plato believed that "Poetry is nearer to vital truth than history." What vital truth has the poet discovered? How does the speaker feel (his attitude) about his subject?
- c.** Re-read the poem, once again noting stylistic devices. You should be analyzing and determining the poem's tone/s, and contemplating the irony within the poem-it will be there. Don't be afraid to take risks; readers reward the unique and insightful thinker.
- d.** Locating shifts IS essential- look for transitions in the poem: but, therefore, since, although, etc. Also, use clear transitions in your essay. These help the reader follow the flow of your essay.
Keep your paragraphs organized; don't digress.
- e.** Make a very brief plan before you write: cluster, list, etc.
- f.** Begin to write. Get to the point. Cite title, poet, and central purpose, perhaps making a philosophical comment as you introduce your thesis. Try to make a strong first impression.
- g.** Write to express, not impress. Inflated writing seldom gets the top scores.
- h.** Use all your time, approaching the poem chronologically-line by line, or stanza by stanza- if you are comfortable with that; if not, you might approach your analysis through the different elements: irony, tone, alliteration, metaphors, etc.
- i.** Before you end your essay, revisit the title and its implications, making sure you include

a reference to it in your essay.

j. Pay careful attention to the first and last two lines of the poem.

k. Save a minute or two to proofread your essay; if you cannot read it, the readers won't be able to either!

l. Make sure you have put the title in quotation marks and that you have included the poet's name.

m. Do not confuse the poet with the speaker. They will almost always be different and you will run into trouble if you do.

Other Points to Remember

1. Always refer to the poet or speaker by last name only-never use first name only.
2. Give support and more support. Use the poem!
3. Use ellipsis dots to shorten a long quote, and keep quotations from the poem as short as possible. One word is often enough. The readers have the poem in front of them; a full sentence is nearly always too much by far.
4. When citing an element, don't just mention it. Explain how it functions
5. Avoid "laundry lists" of elements that go nowhere.
6. When referring to a word as a word, underline it or put quotes around it. ("Nothing" is repeated frequently)
7. Place the end punctuation mark inside the quotation.
8. If you finish writing before time is up, DON'T. You should be using every single minute.
9. Read your response backward; this allows you to catch mistakes because you are forced to look at each word.

- 10. Check spelling as best as you can.**
- 11. Avoid giving your essay a title.**
- 12. Do not bother with line numbers; they are not necessary in a timed writing, and we do not look at them.**
- 13. Underline titles of long works; use quotation marks around titles of shorter works. Poems are put in quotation marks!**
- 14. Do NOT write in pencil.**
- 15. Do not use white out; we understand that you are writing a rough draft.**
- 16. Don't define terms; the readers are experienced AP teachers and college professors.**

Fifty Fun Things to do during an AP Exam

by Roy Deering, AP Instructor in Oklahoma

NOTE: You should not attempt these things during an actual exam. The following is meant for entertainment purposes only.

1. Bring a pillow. Fall asleep (or pretend to) until the last 15 minutes. Wake up, say "oh geez, better get cracking" and do some gibberish work. Turn it in a few minutes early.
2. Get a copy of the exam, run out screaming "Andre, Andre, I've got the secret documents!!"
3. If it is a math/science exam, answer in essay form. If it is long answer/essay form, answer with numbers and symbols. Be creative. Use the integral symbol.
4. Make paper airplanes out of the exam. Aim them at the instructor's left nostril.
5. Talk the entire way through the exam. Read questions aloud, debate your answers with yourself out loud. If asked to stop, yell out, "I'm so sure you can hear me thinking. " Then start talking about what a jerk the instructor is.
6. Bring cheerleaders.
7. Walk in, get the exam, sit down. About five minutes into it, loudly say to the instructor, "I don't understand any of this. I've been to every lecture all semester long! What's the deal? And who are you? Where's the regular guy?"
8. Bring a Game Boy (or today's popular equivalent). Play with the volume at max level.
9. On the answer sheet (book, whatever) find a new, interesting way to refuse to answer every question. For example: I refuse to answer this question on the grounds that it conflicts with my religious beliefs. Be creative.
10. Bring pets.
11. Run into the exam room looking about frantically. Breathe a sigh of relief. Go to the instructor, say "They've found me, I have to leave the country" and run off.

- 12. Fifteen minutes into the exam, stand up, rip up all the papers into very small pieces, throw them into the air and yell out "Merry Christmas. "If you're really daring, ask for another copy of the exam. Say you lost the first one. Repeat this process every fifteen minutes.**
- 13. Do the exam with crayons, paint, or fluorescent markers.**
- 14. Come into the exam wearing slippers, a bathrobe, a towel on your head, and nothing else.**
- 15. Come down with a BAD case of Turet's Syndrome during the exam. Be as vulgar as possible.**
- 16. Do the entire exam in another language. If you don't know one, make one up! For math/science exams, try using Roman numerals.**
- 17. Bring things to throw at the instructor when s/he's not looking. Blame it on the person nearest to you.**
- 18. As soon as the instructor hands you the exam, eat it.**
- 19. Walk into the exam with an entourage. Claim you are going to be taping your next video during the exam. Try to get the instructor to let them stay, be persuasive. Tell the instructor to expect a percentage of the profits if they are allowed to stay.**
- 20. Every five minutes, stand up, collect all your things, move to another seat, continue with the exam.**
- 21. Turn in the exam approximately 30 minutes into it. As you walk out, start commenting on how easy it was.**
- 22. Do the entire exam as if it was multiple choice and true/false. If it is a multiple choice exam, spell out interesting things (DCCAB. BABE. etc. .).**
- 23. Bring a black marker. Return the exam with all questions and answers completely blacked out.**
- 24. Get the exam. Twenty minutes into it, throw your papers down violently, scream out "Forget this!" and walk out triumphantly.**

25. Arrange a protest before the exam starts (i. e. Threaten the instructor that whether or not everyone's done, they are all leaving after one hour to go drink)

26. Text.

27. Every now and then, clap twice rapidly. If the instructor asks why, tell him/her in a very derogatory tone, "The light bulb that goes on above my head when I get an idea is hooked up to a clapper. DUH!"

28. Comment on how sexy the instructor is looking that day.

29. Come to the exam wearing a black cloak. After about 30 minutes, put on a white mask and start yelling "I'm here, the phantom of the opera" until they drag you away.

30. Go to an exam for a class you have no clue about, where you know the class is very small, and the instructor would recognize you if you belonged. Claim that you have been to every lecture. Fight for your right to take the exam.

31. Upon receiving the exam, look it over, while laughing loudly, say, "You don't really expect me to waste my time on this drivel? Days of our Lives is on!!!"

32. Bring a water pistol with you.

33. From the moment the exam begins, hum the theme to *Jeopardy*. Ignore the instructor's requests for you to stop. When they finally get you to leave one way or another, begin whistling the theme to the Bridge on the River Kwai.

34. Start a brawl in the middle of the exam.

35. If the exam is math/science related, make up the longest proofs you could possibly think of. Get pi and imaginary numbers into most equations. If it is a written exam, relate everything to your own life story.

36. Come in wearing a full knight's outfit, complete with sword and shield.

37. Bring a friend to give you a back massage the entire way through the exam. Insist this person is needed, because you have bad circulation.

38. Bring cheat sheets for another class (make sure this is obvious. . . like history notes for a calculus exam. . . otherwise you're not just failing, you're getting kicked out too) and

staple them to the exam, with the comment "Please use the attached notes for references as you see fit. "

39. When you walk in, complain about the heat.

40. After you get the exam, call the instructor over, point to any question, ask for the answer. Try to work it out of him/her.

41. One word: Wrestlemania.

42. Bring balloons, blow them up, start throwing them around like they do before concerts start.

43. Try to get people in the room to do the wave.

44. Play frisbee with a friend at the other side of the room.

45. Bring one pencil with a very sharp point. Break the point off your paper. Sharpen the pencil. Repeat this process for one hour.

46. Get deliveries of candy, flowers, balloons, telegrams, etc. sent to you every few minutes throughout the exam.

47. During the exam, take apart everything around you. Desks, chairs, anything you can reach.

48. Complete the exam with everything you write being backwards at a 90 degree angle.

49. Bring a musical instrument with you, play various tunes. If you are asked to stop, say, "It helps me think. " Bring a copy of the Student Handbook with you, challenging the instructor to find the section on musical instruments during finals. Don't forget to use the phrase "Told you so."

50. Answer the exam with the "Top Ten Reasons Why Professor xxxx is a Terrible Teacher"